

Results From a Montana 2023 **Non-Resident** Elk Hunter Survey

A Survey Conducted By:



Wildlife Division

June 2023



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BACKGROUND AND SURVEY METHODS

The focus of this report are results from a non-resident elk hunter survey conducted by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) in Montana. Following the 2022 hunting season, FWP conducted this survey to help evaluate Montana's elk management relative to hunting and harvest opportunities.

Mailback surveys were sent to a randomly selected statewide sample of N=800 non-resident Montana elk license holders pulled from the pool of all non-resident elk license holders for the 2022 hunting season (as identified from FWP's automated license system database). Survey mailings included an initial mailing of the surveys sent out in late December 2022, followed up by replacement mailings sent out to non-respondents about four to five weeks after the initial mailing of the surveys. Surveys were successfully mailed out to a total of N=794 non-resident elk license holders (there were a total of six surveys that were undeliverable). A total of N=375 non-resident elk license holders responded to the survey, resulting in an overall 47 percent response rate for the non-resident survey. This response rate is considered to be good for a mailback survey of this kind.

This report provides only overall statewide results from this important survey. Due to the sample size for the non-resident survey, region specific survey information is not available from this study. However, survey results include information regarding which region of Montana nonresidents spent the most time hunting elk during the past five years (see the map below for the seven FWP administrative regions of Montana).



SURVEY RESULTS

Overall, 96 percent of all the survey respondents reported they hunted elk in Montana during the past five years. These respondents are the focus of this report.

Importance of Elk Hunting in Montana

Response to... “How important is ELK hunting to you in Montana? (Check only ONE below)”

- 0.0% It is **my LEAST important** hunting activity
- 0.6% It is **one of my least important** hunting activities
- 14.2% It is **no more or no less important** than my other hunting activities
- 47.4% It is **one of my most important** hunting activities
- 37.9% It is **my MOST important** hunting activity

Elk Hunting by Region of Montana

Response to... “In what **REGION** of the state have you spent the MOST TIME hunting ELK in Montana during the past FIVE years? (Check only ONE below)”

- 4.5% Region 1
- 45.4% Region 3
- 7.5% Region 5
- 6.1% Region 7
- 9.2% Region 2
- 24.2% Region 4
- 3.1% Region 6

Reasons Why Hunters Spend Most of Their Time Hunting Elk in this Region of Montana (Aggregate Results for All Seven Regions of Montana Combined)

Response to... “On a scale from 1 (very unimportant) to 5 (very important), how important were the following potential reasons for why you spent most of your time hunting elk in this REGION of the state during the past five years? (Circle only ONE number for each item below)”

	1 Very Unimportant	2	3	4	5 Very Important
To hunt close to home	58.1%	10.5%	12.0%	6.9%	12.3%
To hunt in a familiar location	17.8%	6.2%	21.1%	23.1%	31.8%
Elk numbers	4.5%	4.5%	27.7%	33.3%	30.1%
<u>Antlerless</u> elk numbers	22.5%	11.5%	30.2%	21.9%	13.9%
<u>Bull</u> elk numbers	5.6%	5.9%	27.0%	30.0%	31.5%
Access to hunt <u>antlerless</u> elk on PUBLICLY owned land	28.9%	11.0%	17.6%	18.5%	24.1%
Access to hunt <u>antlerless</u> elk on PRIVATELY owned land	44.0%	11.3%	12.5%	15.2%	17.0%
Access to hunt <u>bull</u> elk on PUBLICLY owned land	13.9%	5.0%	15.0%	18.6%	47.5%
Access to hunt <u>bull</u> elk on PRIVATELY owned land	31.3%	9.1%	13.6%	18.0%	28.0%
To be able to hunt <u>elk</u> and <u>other game species</u> at the same time	10.7%	6.2%	21.6%	24.3%	37.3%

Perceptions Regarding Opportunities to Hunt Elk in the Region of Montana Where Respondents Spent the Most Time Hunting Elk During the Past Five Years (Aggregate Results for All Seven Regions of Montana Combined)

Response to... “On a scale from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent), how would you rate the following in this **REGION** of Montana? (Circle only **ONE** number for each item below)”

	1	2	3	4	5
	Poor				Excellent
Overall opportunities to hunt elk	2.4%	3.6%	23.3%	42.1%	28.7%
Opportunities to hunt <u>antlerless</u> elk	6.0%	6.7%	24.8%	38.4%	24.1%
Opportunities to hunt <u>bull</u> elk	3.3%	9.5%	22.8%	37.7%	26.7%
Opportunities to hunt <u>mature bull</u> elk	7.0%	13.6%	30.9%	30.3%	18.2%

Perceptions Regarding Access to Hunt Elk in the Region of Montana Where Respondents Spent the Most Time Hunting Elk During the Past Five Years (Aggregate Results for All Seven Regions of Montana Combined)

Response to... “On a scale from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent), how would you rate the following in this **REGION** of Montana? (Circle only **ONE** number for each item below)”

	1	2	3	4	5
	Poor				Excellent
Access to PUBLICLY owned land to hunt <u>antlerless</u> elk	6.0%	10.0%	22.7%	38.1%	23.1%
Access to PRIVATELY owned land to hunt <u>antlerless</u> elk	24.7%	13.8%	21.6%	20.1%	19.8%
Access to PUBLICLY owned land to hunt <u>bull</u> elk	3.8%	9.4%	22.9%	33.2%	30.7%
Access to PRIVATELY owned land to hunt <u>bull</u> elk	24.8%	10.8%	19.9%	23.4%	21.0%

Perceptions Regarding Numbers of Elk During the Hunting Season in the Region of Montana Where Respondents Spent the Most Time Hunting Elk During the Past Five Years (Aggregate Results for All Seven Regions of Montana Combined)

Response to... “On a scale from 1 (too few) to 5 (too many), how would you rate the following in this **REGION** of Montana during the hunting season? (Circle only **ONE** number for each item below)”

	1	2	3	4	5
	Too Few				Too Many
Overall numbers of elk	9.0%	16.3%	56.6%	15.7%	2.3%
Overall numbers of <u>antlerless</u> elk	8.6%	15.2%	53.9%	18.2%	4.2%
Overall numbers of <u>bull</u> elk	12.4%	23.1%	50.6%	12.7%	1.2%
Overall numbers of <u>mature bull</u> elk	18.7%	32.8%	38.6%	8.4%	1.5%
Numbers of <u>antlerless</u> elk on PUBLICLY owned lands	13.5%	25.0%	46.2%	12.8%	2.4%
Numbers of <u>antlerless</u> elk on PRIVATELY owned lands	7.5%	8.3%	37.4%	25.7%	21.1%
Numbers of <u>bull</u> elk on PUBLICLY owned lands	17.5%	28.3%	44.4%	8.1%	1.7%
Numbers of <u>bull</u> elk on PRIVATELY owned lands	8.4%	10.6%	35.4%	26.2%	19.4%

Perceptions Regarding the Number of Elk Hunters During the Hunting Season in the Region of Montana Where Respondents Spent the Most Time Hunting Elk During the Past Five Years (Aggregate Results for All Seven Regions of Montana Combined)

Response to... “On a scale from 1 (too few) to 5 (too many), how would you rate the following in this **REGION** of Montana during the hunting season? (Circle only ONE number for each item below)”

	1	2	3	4	5
	<u>Too Few</u>				<u>Too Many</u>
Number of elk hunters	1.9%	4.7%	59.4%	23.1%	10.9%

Perceptions Regarding the Number of Roads Open for Motorized Access to Elk During the Hunting Season in the Region of Montana Where Respondents Spent the Most Time Hunting Elk During the Past Five Years (Aggregate Results for All Seven Regions of Montana Combined)

Response to... “On a scale from 1 (too few) to 5 (too many), how would you rate the following in this **REGION** of Montana during the hunting season? (Circle only ONE number for each item below)”

	1	2	3	4	5
	<u>Too Few</u>				<u>Too Many</u>
Number of roads open for motorized access to elk	5.9%	14.5%	49.5%	17.5%	12.5%

Perceptions Regarding the Number of Other Hunters Typically Seen While Hunting Elk in the Region of Montana Where Respondents Spent the Most Time Hunting Elk During the Past Five Years (Aggregate Results for All Seven Regions of Montana Combined)

Response to... “In terms of congestion & crowding, on a scale from 1 (very unacceptable) to 5 (very acceptable), how acceptable was the NUMBER of other hunters you typically observed PER DAY when hunting elk in this **REGION** of Montana? (Circle only ONE number below)”

(Very unacceptable)	1	2	3	4	5	(Very acceptable)
	4.4%	11.9%	39.3%	24.1%	20.2%	

Response to... “In terms of the behavior of people, on a scale from 1 (very unacceptable) to 5 (very acceptable), how acceptable was the BEHAVIOR of other hunters you typically observed when hunting elk in this **REGION** of Montana? (Circle only ONE number below)”

(Very unacceptable)	1	2	3	4	5	(Very acceptable)
	2.8%	5.6%	21.4%	29.8%	40.4%	

Satisfaction With Current Elk Hunting Regulations in the Region of Montana Where Respondents Spent the Most Time Hunting Elk During the Past Five Years (Aggregate Results for All Seven Regions of Montana Combined)

Response to... “On a scale from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied), how satisfied are you with the current elk hunting regulations in this **REGION** of Montana? (Circle only ONE number below)”

(Very dissatisfied)	1	2	3	4	5	(Very satisfied)
	3.1%	9.2%	28.9%	37.5%	21.4%	

Opinions Regarding the Ease of Understanding Current Elk Hunting Regulations in the Region of Montana Where Respondents Spent the Most Time Hunting Elk During the Past Five Years (Aggregate Results for All Seven Regions of Montana Combined)

Response to... “On a scale from 1 (very difficult to understand) to 5 (very easy to understand), how would you rate the ease of understanding the current elk hunting regulations in this **REGION** of Montana? (Circle only **ONE** number below)”

(Very difficult to understand) 1 2 3 4 5 (Very easy to understand)
 6.1% 10.8% 31.3% 36.8% 15.0%

Opinions Regarding How Restrictive Elk Hunting Regulations Should be in Montana

Managing for higher numbers of MATURE bull elk (e.g., bull elk 4-5 years of age or older) may require implementing more restrictive elk hunting regulations. For instance, in current limited permit areas in Montana the average drawing odds are once every ten years.

Response to... “Given only ONE CHOICE, which of the following would be most favorable to you in MONTANA as a whole? (Check only **ONE** below)”

63.9% The opportunity to hunt bull elk every year somewhere in Montana (with a *lower probability* of harvesting a mature bull)

-OR-

36.1% The opportunity to hunt bull elk once every several years somewhere in Montana (with a *higher probability* of harvesting a mature bull)

Response to... “Given only ONE CHOICE, which of the following would be most favorable to you in the REGION of Montana where you’ve spent the most time hunting elk during the past FIVE years? (Check only **ONE** below)”

66.1% The opportunity to hunt bull elk every year in this REGION of the state (with a *lower probability* of harvesting a mature bull)

-OR-

33.9% The opportunity to hunt bull elk once every several years in this REGION of the state (with a *higher probability* of harvesting a mature bull)

Response to... “On a scale from 1 (very unacceptable) to 5 (very acceptable), how acceptable would it be to you if more restrictive elk season types were implemented to reduce congestion and crowding in places where the number of elk hunters observed in the field per day has become unacceptable to most elk hunters? Under such a scenario, more restrictive elk season types might be considered even if elk population numbers support more liberal elk season types. (Circle only **ONE** number below)”

(Very unacceptable) 1 2 3 4 5 (Very acceptable)
 15.2% 22.4% 34.5% 15.2% 12.6%

Response to... “On a scale from 1 (very unacceptable) to 5 (very acceptable), how acceptable would it be to you if more restrictive elk season types were implemented to reduce congestion and crowding in places where the number of elk hunters observed in the field per day has become unacceptable to most private landowners? Under such a scenario, more restrictive elk season types might be considered even if elk population numbers support more liberal elk season types. (Circle only **ONE** number below)”

(Very unacceptable) 1 2 3 4 5 (Very acceptable)
 21.5% 19.5% 34.0% 16.3% 8.7%

Response to... “Implementing more restrictive elk hunting regulations in a Hunting District can lead to increased elk hunting pressure on less restrictive Hunting Districts in the state. On a scale from 1 (very unacceptable) to 5 (very acceptable), how acceptable or unacceptable to you is this tradeoff? (Circle only **ONE** number below)”

(Very unacceptable)	1	2	3	4	5	(Very acceptable)
	15.3%	23.6%	44.7%	12.1%	4.3%	

Response to... “On a scale from 1 (very unimportant) to 5 (very important), how important is it to you to be able to consistently hunt ELK in the same place in Montana each and every year? (Circle only **ONE** number below)”

(Very unimportant)	1	2	3	4	5	(Very important)
	5.4%	8.9%	20.6%	28.9%	36.1%	

Opinions Regarding the Timing of the Elk Hunting Season in Montana

Response to... “On a scale from 1 (strongly oppose) to 5 (strongly support), to what extent do you support or oppose the current timing of the five-week general rifle season for ELK hunting in Montana which starts the third weekend in October and ends the Sunday after Thanksgiving? (Circle only **ONE** number below)”

(Strongly oppose)	1	2	3	4	5	(Strongly Support)
	1.7%	4.8%	25.6%	27.2%	40.7%	

Response to... “On a scale from 1 (very unimportant) to 5 (very important), how important is it to you that the timing of the general rifle season for ELK hunting matches up with the timing of the general rifle season for mule deer hunting in Montana? (Circle only **ONE** number below)”

(Very unimportant)	1	2	3	4	5	(Very important)
	7.9%	6.2%	23.4%	23.7%	38.9%	

Interest in Hunting Elk in Montana During the Archery, General Rifle, Muzzleloader, and Winter/Late Shoulder Seasons in Montana

Response to... “On a scale from 1 (very disinterested) to 5 (very interested), how interested are you in hunting ELK during the ARCHERY season in Montana? (Circle only **ONE** number below)”

(Very disinterested)	1	2	3	4	5	(Very interested)
	15.4%	10.3%	13.4%	12.0%	48.9%	

Response to... “On a scale from 1 (very disinterested) to 5 (very interested), how interested are you in hunting ELK during the GENERAL RIFLE season in Montana? (Circle only **ONE** number below)”

(Very disinterested)	1	2	3	4	5	(Very interested)
	6.4%	5.3%	14.8%	19.3%	54.2%	

Response to... “On a scale from 1 (very disinterested) to 5 (very interested), how interested are you in hunting ELK during the MUZZLELOADER season in Montana? (Circle only **ONE** number below)”

(Very disinterested)	1	2	3	4	5	(Very interested)
	37.4%	21.5%	22.1%	10.9%	8.1%	

Response to... “On a scale from 1 (very disinterested) to 5 (very interested), how interested are you in hunting ELK during the winter/late SHOULDER season in Montana? (Circle only **ONE** number below)”

(Very disinterested)	1	2	3	4	5	(Very interested)
	32.7%	19.4%	21.4%	14.9%	11.5%	

Interest in Harvesting Antlerless Elk and Bull Elk in Montana

Response to... “On a scale from 1 (very disinterested) to 5 (very interested), how interested are you in harvesting antlerless ELK in Montana? (Circle only ONE number below)”

(Very disinterested)	1	2	3	4	5	(Very interested)
	11.2%	9.2%	15.9%	24.9%	38.8%	

Response to... “On a scale from 1 (very disinterested) to 5 (very interested), how interested are you in harvesting bull ELK in Montana? (Circle only ONE number below)”

(Very disinterested)	1	2	3	4	5	(Very interested)
	0.8%	0.8%	5.9%	17.6%	74.8%	

Satisfaction with Elk Management in Montana

Response to... “On a scale from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied), how satisfied are you with current ELK management in Montana? (Circle only ONE number below)”

(Very dissatisfied)	1	2	3	4	5	(Very satisfied)
	1.7%	5.1%	33.7%	42.8%	16.7%	

Trust in FWP to Manage Elk in Montana

Response to... “On a scale from 1 (little or no trust) to 5 (very high trust), how much trust do you place in FWP to manage ELK in Montana? (Circle only ONE number below)”

(Little or no trust)	1	2	3	4	5	(Very high trust)
	1.7%	8.0%	22.7%	45.5%	22.2%	

Motives (or Reasons) for Hunting Elk in Montana

Response to... “Below is a list of different reasons why people go elk hunting. On a scale from 1 (very unimportant) to 5 (very important), please indicate how important each of these reasons are to you for going ELK hunting in Montana. (Circle only ONE number for each reason listed below)”

<u>Reason:</u>	1	2	3	4	5
	Very Unimportant				Very Important
To enjoy nature and the outdoors	0.6%	1.1%	4.5%	20.6%	73.2%
To get venison for eating	2.0%	4.5%	18.7%	27.5%	47.3%
To do something with my family	9.0%	9.9%	16.7%	24.3%	40.1%
To be with friends who have similar interests	4.0%	5.1%	8.8%	28.3%	53.8%
To feel the exhilaration of the hunt	1.4%	4.2%	12.4%	30.1%	51.8%
To develop my skills and abilities	2.0%	5.6%	20.6%	32.1%	39.7%
To test my hunting skills	2.5%	5.1%	18.9%	29.6%	43.9%
To harvest a mature bull	3.1%	6.8%	26.2%	23.4%	40.6%
To feel a sense of accomplishment	4.2%	4.5%	18.4%	28.9%	43.9%
To experience solitude	3.9%	4.8%	16.9%	25.6%	48.7%

Where Non-Resident Elk Hunters Typically Get Their Information Regarding Elk & Management in Montana

Response to... “From what sources do you typically get MOST of your information regarding elk and elk management in Montana? (Check ALL that apply below)”

67.5%	Family and/or friends	5.6%	Facebook
30.6%	Word of mouth	2.5%	Instagram
46.1%	Other elk hunters	0.3%	Twitter
51.4%	FWP	13.1%	YouTube
50.0%	Montana hunting regulations	9.2%	Television, radio, newspaper, or magazine
24.7%	Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation	0.6%	Local or regional online event calendar(s)
6.1%	Sportsperson group(s)	0.6%	Community bulletin board(s)
23.3%	Private landowners	9.7%	Other source (e.g., outfitters/guides, podcasts, GoHunt, onX)
29.7%	Website(s)		

Additional Special Questions Asked in the Survey

Response to... “Prior to this hunting season (2022), did you apply for any special elk hunting permits?”

64.1% NO

35.9% YES.....“If yes, please answer the following question. Under a new Montana elk hunting regulation, individuals who successfully draw an either-sex elk permit are limited to hunting bull elk in Montana ONLY in the hunting district for which their permit is valid. Did this new regulation affect how you approached applying for permits?”

70.3% NO

29.7% YES

Verbatim Comments:

- It would be nice to have the option to look somewhere else if needed.
- Why when I got a landowner sponsor deer tag, can't I apply for a limited entry bull tag? 1st choice and a antlerless tag 2nd choice.
- Would be nice to hunt multiple districts. Having more options, weather can sometimes prohibit hunting in one district, where as another district could be more favorable.
- Hunted R3 for 15 years license is very expensive. Will crossbow ever be allowed?
- Have never drew a special unit.
- I'm an archer hunter, I love to hunt. Don't discriminate based on size or sex. I like to apply for Elk B tags.
- I like it-it helps keep hunter #'s down.
- I applied for shoulder season.
- I only apply in district where we have private land.
- Landowners are the ones who bear burden of caring for and dealing with elk populations their input should be more important than any hunter. Especially out of state hunters like myself. This survey should only be sent to landowners not hunters.
- Drew a great tag and was lucky enough to harvest a large 6x6 in that special permit area.
- I was unaware of the new regulation because I drew the Big Game Combo tag in 2022 and had no need to pursue another elk permit.
- This prevents hunting with friends or family in other districts & seems arbitrary and antithetical to certain core values.
- Time to open up more bull elk tags in central Montana in Region 5 they have too many elk.
- I liked it.
- It's a good rule.

Response to... "This past hunting season (2022), did you hunt elk in any special permit elk hunting districts?"

80.8% NO

19.2% YES....."If yes, please answer the following two questions. Under a new Montana elk hunting regulation, individuals who successfully draw an either-sex elk permit are limited to hunting bull elk in Montana ONLY in the hunting district for which their permit is valid."

a. "Do you think this new regulation results in any changes to hunting pressure in the special permit area(s) you hunted? (check only ONE below)"

26.5% NO

7.4% YES, it decreased hunting pressure

4.4% YES, it increased hunting pressure

61.8% I don't know

b. "Do you think this new regulation results in any changes to elk harvest in the special permit area(s) you hunted? (check only ONE below)"

20.6% NO

7.4% YES, it decreased elk harvest

4.4% YES, it increased elk harvest

67.6% I don't know

Background Characteristics of Survey Respondents

Response to... "During the past FIVE years, have you hunted MULE DEER in Montana?"

39.5% NO

60.5% YES....."If yes, on a scale from 1 (never or rarely) to 5 (all the time), how often do you also hunt ELK (or would harvest an ELK) while you are primarily mule deer hunting? (Circle only ONE number below)"

(Never or rarely)	1	2	3	4	5	(All the time)
	12.8%	9.2%	13.3%	16.5%	48.2%	

Response to... "How many of the past FIVE years have you hunted ELK in Montana? (Check only ONE below)"

36.3% 1 year

17.7% 2 years

17.2% 3 years

12.7% 4 years

16.1% All 5 years

Response to... "On average, about how many DAYS PER YEAR do you hunt ELK in Montana?"

Mean = 8.8 days per year

Median = 7.0

Age of respondents: Mean 51.5 years of age; Median 54.0

15-19 (2.5%) 20-24 (1.7%) 25-34 (8.6%) 35-44 (19.1%) 45-54 (21.0%) 55-64 (28.7%) 65-74 (14.9%) 75-84 (3.3%) 85+ (0.3%)